

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHCL #0010/01 0101423
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 101423Z JAN 07
FM AMCONSUL CASABLANCA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7560
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 2848
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0727
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0234
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3682
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 2211
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 7821
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 1971
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0508

UNCLAS CASABLANCA 000010

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: WOMEN'S NGO SAYS LAW CHANGED, NOT PRACTICE

REF: 06 RABAT 02189

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Volunteers and staff members of the NGO Union for Women's Action say that while Morocco's new Family Code has brought some change, its laws are not followed consistently in practice. Reasons cited include the inclination of some judges to ignore new statutes, the unwillingness of certain elements of society to accept change, and the lack of a sufficient awareness campaign. The organization believes these issues can and should be addressed, but lacks the resources to pursue its initiatives. END SUMMARY.

UNION FOR WOMEN'S ACTION

2. (U) On December 14, 2006, CG and econoff met with Casablanca representatives of the Union for Women's Action (l'Union de l'Action Feminine or UAF), an NGO that promotes women's rights, and provides counseling and training to battered women. Started in 1983 as the March 8 Movement, after the date of International Women's Day, the organization became official in 1987. It now has thirty-two branches in Morocco, and is headquartered in Rabat.

3. (U) About nine women joined the meeting at UAF's SOS Annajda Center, a counseling facility in Casablanca. The group included several staff members, as well as several doctors and lawyers who volunteer their time and services to help the center's clients. The women counsel victims of violence, and the lawyers among them follow court cases and arrange mediation sessions for couples who cannot afford to bring their cases to court.

4. (U) UAF also offers literacy and professional training for women. According to one staff member, the center began to notice in 2004 that most victims of violence did not have money to support themselves and their children. This realization led to the creation of a center to train women in computer skills, embroidery, hair dressing and other skills that would enable them to become self-sufficient. The center estimates that it assisted about 400 women in 2004 and 2005, and about 150 in 2006, and demand remains strong.

SLOW IMPLEMENTATION OF FAMILY CODE

5. (U) While the women agreed that recent changes to the Moudawana, or Family Code, have had an impact, they were quick to detail implementation shortcomings. To begin, they described the problem of judges who ignore the new code and continue to authorize polygamy or

marriage for young girls. They emphasized that judges have significant power to do as they please, and some flout new provisions, such as divorce, that the Moudawana supports. Citing another example, the women explained that although the new Moudawana allows judges to issue restraining orders against abusive spouses, they frequently do not do so when the need arises. As one woman aptly put it, the text is there, but enforcement is not.

¶16. (U) Annajda Center volunteers and staff acknowledged that segments of Moroccan society do not accept the Moudawana's changes. They attribute this in part to Morocco's high illiteracy rate, which approaches seventy-four percent in some areas. They also feel that the state did not put enough effort into publicizing and explaining changes in the law. They struggle to combat the perception that the new code is a law against men, rather than a law for the family.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

¶17. (U) UAF representatives had several suggestions for how to put changes to the Moudawana into practice. They advocate not only training judges, but also a far-reaching awareness campaign to inform Moroccans of what the changes actually mean. They would also like to see demonstrations against ideas that undercut the Moudawana. The movement to revise the Family Code met with opposition from the time it was initiated in 1992, and still faces resistance from Islamists and conservative elements of society.

¶18. (U) While the women believe changes to the Moudawana are comprehensive, they see room for improvement. As the law currently stands, a mother is not always considered the guardian of her children in case of divorce. This often complicates legal matters, for example when a father's signature may be required. In addition, a mother cannot pass her nationality on to her children if she marries a foreigner. Issues of inheritance also need to be addressed. Perhaps the biggest change the women desire is more money and better infrastructure to implement the Family Code's new provisions. In a city of four million people, Casablanca does not have the financial or human resources to meet families' demands for social services.

¶19. (U) When asked what they considered priorities for UAF's Casablanca branch, the women at the Annajda Center put full-time staff at the top of their list. They currently rely heavily on volunteers, and would like to have their own staff lawyers and social workers. They would also like to open a shelter for abused women. The Annajda Center in Rabat has a shelter that can accommodate up to forty people, but UAF runs no such facility in the larger city of Casablanca.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: The women who work at UAF's Annajda Center in Casablanca, whether as staff members or volunteers, are impressive for both their professional qualifications and their dedication to UAF. Their ideas about how to help women in Morocco are based on first-hand experience, and are well-conceived. For example, they view training for judges as vital to putting the family code into practice, and would like to open a shelter for battered women in Casablanca, where such facilities are lacking. UAF's support for women's rights and the new Family Code dovetails with recent Mission reform efforts in these areas, and their on-the-ground perspective underscores the importance of continuing to provide such organizations with resources to pursue their initiatives. END COMMENT.

GREENE